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ABSTRACT

A training program is described that was developed to improve administrators' supervisory skills in conducting classroom observations and conferences with teachers. The program includes training in the seven phases of clinical supervision and their respective skill components, including an understanding of the six forces that affect conferences. The seven phases of clinical supervision are as follows: (1) establish teaching expectancies; (2) observe teaching behaviors; (3) label teaching behaviors; (4) analyze teaching behaviors; (5) plan for instructional conference; (6) conduct the conference; and (7) establish follow-up. Forces that can have an impact on a conference plan and outcome include the following: (1) a common understanding of effective teaching skills; (2) previous knowledge that the teacher and supervisor have about one another; (3) the lesson's relationship to short- and long-range expectations; (4) the supervisor's knowledge of the content being taught; (5) the degree of commitment toward improving instruction, on the part of both the teacher and the supervisor; and (6) personality characteristics of both the supervisor and the teacher. Videotaped lessons, role playing, and small groups provide administrators opportunities to analyze a variety of lessons using clinical supervision. (MLF)

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An Advanced Staff Development Program

for Administrators

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The nation's cyclical focused efforts to examine education are now upon us. Spurred by reports such as "The Nation At Risk" and John Goodlad's "A Place Called School," school districts across the country are researching and implementing staff development programs at near record pace. The targets for most of these school reform measures have been the classroom teachers, and for a number of understandable reasons:

1. The teaching population of any school district is sufficient in number to afford researchers and practitioners an adequate data base with which to measure efforts at intervention;
2. Teachers represent the conduit through which all efforts to improve schools must flow;
3. Teachers represent the largest group of potential change agents in a learning enterprise.

Innovations and experimentations must first gain the understanding and acceptance of teachers, if they are, indeed, to make it to the classroom on a regular basis. But while teachers do play an extremely significant role in the improvement of instruction in America's schools, equal emphasis must be placed with their instructional partners, the building administrators. All too often the districts' focus on skills critical to the improvement of teaching effectiveness has slighted the companion needs of administrators. This has resulted in some administrators feeling less than secure about their supervisory skills in conducting classroom observations and conferences with teachers, for a number of reasons.

1. <u>Teachers want more feedback than administrators can give</u>

   Teachers involved in a comprehensive staff development program designed to improve teaching effectiveness begin to ask for more practical feedback during supervisory conferences. Administrators not prepared to provide this assistance will tend to avoid these situations. In addition, time constraints on administrators result in some real limits on their opportunities for clinical supervision. Thus, there can be a mismatch between what teachers want and what supervisors are willing or able to give.

2. <u>Teachers have more chances to practice skills</u>

   Teachers have daily, full day opportunities to practice what they have learned about effective instruction. Administrators do not have nearly the same opportunities to practice effective teaching strategies nor the chances to practice effective supervisory conferences. This increases the likelihood that teachers will become more knowledgeable than administrators of a common base of information. This increase in skills is positive from a teacher's perspective but also means that administrators need to expend greater effort to stay at even a comparable level to teachers in knowledge and skill level.

3. The path of least resistance

It is natural for administrators to want to do that which is easiest for them and that which they do well. Conferences with teachers where administrators give the positive feedback on that which went well are the easiest types of conference for many administrators to conduct. Those conferences may be well received by the teacher. Although there is an appropriate time for such conferences, they are not appropriate for all teachers in all circumstances. Teachers who are ready to change and are interested in improving benefit least from a cosmetic conference experience.

What follows is an explanation of the critical components of an administrative staff development program that has been implemented in many school districts throughout the country. Included in the discussion will be an overview of:

1. Seven phases of clinical supervision and their respective skill components,

2. Various forces having an impact on conference settings and conference outcomes,

3. How two districts in Wisconsin: Oregon and Green Bay, have implemented the advanced staff development program for administrators.

Seven Phases of Clinical Supervision

1. Establish Teaching Expectancies

Informally (via note or in conversation) or formally (during a pre-observation conference), the supervisor establishes the teaching expectancies. Included in the decisions may be such things as whether the supervisor will observe part or all of a lesson, whether there will be routine or unique conditions during that class, when the conference will be held and what the instructional focus will be.

2. Observe Teaching Behaviors

The supervisor collects data using a script tape method, recording in abbreviated form, what the teacher says.

3. Label Teaching Behaviors

The supervisor labels teaching behaviors using the categories of instructional skills.

4. Analyze Teaching Behaviors

The supervisor analyzes the data from that lesson to determine teacher behavior patterns as well as isolated happenings. Further analysis considers whether those patterns should or should not have occurred. Each pattern or isolated event is examined to determine the apparent cause-effect relationship to teaching effectiveness.

5. Plan for Instructional Conference

Basically, this phase involves selection of primary and secondary objectives, determining strategy for the conference and selection of the particular conference type.

6. Conduct the Conference

Effective conferences produce win/win outcomes in that there are significant rewards to be enjoyed by both teacher and supervisor.

A supervisor who is attentive to the many forces which have the potential to impact on a conference is in an optimal position to respond to emerging teacher needs. The type of questions and the way they are asked are often keys to an effective conference. Questions which facilitate a teacher's analysis of his/her own teaching have the potential to result in a more powerful impact than rhetorical questions or pronouncements by a supervisor. Success with questioning in a conference is based more on creativity than imitation, effective listening more than correct asking, understanding of the purpose more than quantity of questions asked and finally, adjusting rather than standardizing of the questions.

7. Establish Follow-up

Plans for follow-up may be suggested by the teacher, the supervisor or agreed upon by both. Decisions on the teaching expectancies as well as the date of the next observation are useful at this time.

Six Forces which have an Impact on Conferences

An approach to clinical supervision so heavily dependent upon analysis skills, needs to give the administrators a framework for doing that analysis. One such framework involves looking at the numerous forces which can have an impact on a conference plan and outcome. Certainly, if the district already has a well developed program for improving teaching effectiveness, the first force, a common understanding of effective teaching skills, establishes a measurable base from which to conduct the analysis.

A second force influencing a conference is the previous knowledge which the teacher and supervisor have about one another. A supervisor's previous knowledge of the teacher provides information about past patterns of success and/or difficulties the teacher has experienced. A teacher's past interactions with a supervisor have a direct influence on a teacher's expectation of the conference.

The third force, the lesson's relationship to short and long range expectations, is closely tied to knowledge of previous performance. For example, the teacher and supervisor may have determined in past conferences that the teacher had difficulty having his/her students remember important concepts for a long period of time. As a result, they may have agreed that retention strategies, particularly those designed to make practice activities more meaningful for students, would be a long term teacher goal.

A fourth force which has a bearing on a conference is the supervisor's knowledge of the content being taught. If the subject matter is familiar to the supervisor, it will be much easier to do a task analysis of the entry level skills a student needs to do a particular activity. This can be useful in determining why the majority of students may have been unable to be successful in an activity. If the supervisor is unfamiliar with the content area, he/she can contribute to the task analysis by asking unbiased questions about the task.

A fifth force having an impact on the conference is the degree of commitment toward improving instruction, on the part of both the teacher and the supervisor. The supervisor can give subtle messages that he/she is less than committed to this goal by allowing interruptions to interfere with the conference, by being unprepared for the conference or by cancelling the conference for marginally important demands.

A sixth force which influences the direction of a conference is the personality type of both the supervisor and the teacher. A supervisor with an awareness of his/her own personality type is in a better position to head off unnecessary conflict by being sensitive to the teacher's personality type and how best the two can work together.

All six of these forces interact with each other. They can all be taken into consideration in planning a conference. They also have the potential to have a significant impact on the outcome of a conference.

Planning the Conference

Of course, administrators can benefit from having guides, not blue prints for planning a conference. A "Thought Process for Conference Planning" models the planning process, keeping instructional skills and theories in focus. Particular attention is given to identifying those most important positive and negative components of a lesson, explaining their occurences through instructional research, then determining how to have the teacher draw conclusions. It is at this time that the choice is made as to which type of conference is most appropriate: a conference designed to identify only those instructional skills used effectively; a conference designed to identify equally effective alternatives to those things which went well, as a way of expanding the repertoire of strategies; a conference designed to have the teacher identify what, if anything, he/she would change and why; a conference designed for growth because of either a desire on the part of the teacher to change or a perception by the supervisor that change should occur; or a conference designed to showcase the very effective teacher by giving that teacher the chance to analyze his/her own lesson.

Administrators' Staff Development Program

The content of the training program, as briefly described above, is important. However, in order for the training program to be effective, other considerations are critical.

The training program must be tailored to the needs of the particular administrators involved, including their knowledge and skill level, their degree of comfort with various types of conferences and their major concerns regarding clinical supervision.

The training program must provide numerous opportunities for administrators to practice. This practice, within the confines of the workshop, should be set up to provide administrators with opportunities to analyze a variety of lessons. Video taped lessons work well for this purpose. Administrators can be more successful in this task if the initial analysis activities involve lessons where the teaching behaviors are more obviously effective or ineffective. It is productive to have the analysis done by small groups, as well as by individuals. They also need many opportunities to plan and conduct conferences. Role playing tasks can be simplified by having a participant assume the role of a cooperative and agreeable teacher. It can

also be simplified by having the supervisor conduct an instructional conference regarding an instructional skill which is most familiar to him/her. It can be made more complex by having the participant conduct an entire conference, rather than just a small portion of one or by having one of the participants assume the role of a teacher who is resistant to change. Just as teachers need feedback on their lessons, supervisors need feedback on their conferences. This can be provided by the workshop instructors, if the ratio of instructor to participant is reasonable.

Finally, of paramount importance throughout the training and the implementation of this program is that the district, from teacher to supervisor to district administrators to school board, is committed to the improvement of instruction. Without that commitment, the necessary collegial environment and trust will not be present.

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